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Reading the Book of Samuel as a Message to the Exiles: A Hermeneutical Shift

Historical critical scholarship has long embraced the Book of Samuel as the place where we hit "pay dirt," so to speak, in terms of source materials for the "History of Israel." For example Martin Noth felt that there was no real history that could be traced for Israel until we get to the period of the monarchy. He subscribes to the idea of some sort of amphictyonic grouping prior to this time, but contends that it is with the monarchy, especially the reigns of David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE, that we get to the "true historically reliable" materials in the Hebrew Canon.¹

This position has been supported by scholars such as Rost, who gave us the theory of the "Throne Succession Narrative," in which he argued that II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings 1-2 is an independent source dating back to the Solomonic court. He theorized it was written by an eyewitness to the events explaining why Solomon, who was not the first in line for the throne of David, was the one to ascend to the throne.² Rost's theory was further supported by Noth in his book, *The Deuteronomistic History*, in which Noth argued that the book of Samuel had very little Deuteronomistic input. Rather he argued all the Dtr did was string together the collection of sources which had already been composed, such as the Ark Narrative (I Samuel 4-6 and II Samuel 6) and the "traditional Succession Narrative" and add the farewell speech of Samuel in I Samuel 12 and a few other notations, such as the regnal formula in I Sam. 13:1 on the reign

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of Saul.³ This was further buttressed by Gerhard von Rad, who argued that in Samuel in general and in the Succession Narrative in particular we reach the first ever example of ancient historiography. One of his major points in support of his argument was the low incidence of references to the deity and lack of miracles within the narrative.⁴ Even Frank Cross⁵ and his school of disciples arguing for a double redaction of the Deuteronomistic history ignore Samuel in their discussions.⁶ Understandably, new literary critics, such as Fokkelman,⁷ Gunn,⁸ and Sternberg⁹ have also adopted this view of coherent narratives in Samuel dating back to Davidic-Solomonic times.

A corollary trend in Samuel studies has been the claim for a prophetic redaction of the book at some time in the eighth to seventh centuries BCE, in which the role of the prophet was highlighted positively in contradistinction to the role of the king. Such scholars as Weiser¹⁰ advocated this view and have been followed to this day by scholars such as P. Kyle McCarter, who authored the Anchor Bible Commentary on I and II Samuel.¹¹

The above two tendencies of interpretation are puzzling for several reasons. Taking the latter point first, the character presentation of the prophets in the book, namely Samuel and Nathan, is not flattering. For example, Samuel does not follow Yahweh's instructions in I Sam. 8:7-9 to give Israel a king. Instead he gives them a diatribe on the negative side of kingship and sends them home. Similarly, he is not only afraid to follow Yahweh's instructions to go to Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:2), but when he gets there he is about to anoint the wrong one (v. 6). By the same token, when David tells Nathan of his plans to build a house for Yahweh (II Sam. 7:2), Nathan approves of the plan, only to find out later that he is out of touch with Yahweh's desires (vv. 3-7). Thus, the argument for a pro-prophetic redaction seems to ignore these dynamics of the text.

The second tendency of Samuel scholarship which is surprising is the viewing of this material primarily as being historically reliable. In the first place there has always been within the history of critical scholarship an understanding of Samuel as having been arranged by a compiler, if not a redactor. Rost had earlier argued that the Ark Narrative was a unified work, written by one author contemporaneous with the events, but that it had been divided up between I and II Samuel. While most scholars follow him on this point,¹² there has not been much speculation about who split it up and put part of it in I Samuel and the other part in II Samuel. Similarly, there has not been much scholarly speculation about why it was split up in the first place.

Similarly, there has been much agreement that the first person Yahweh speeches in II Sam. 12:7b-13, when Nathan pronounces punishment on David for having killed Uriah and marrying Bathsheba, are secondary to the text.¹³ These prophetic pronouncements are argued to form a prophecy-fulfillment scheme between the David-Bathsheba-Uriah incident and the remainder of the book. The problem comes with arguing that the unity of this section of the book is based on secondary materials.

By the same token, it is generally agreed that some of the other events described in the book are presented out of chronological order. For example, the events described in II Samuel 21 (the burying of the corpses of Saul and his sons) appear to have taken place prior to the events in II Samuel 9 (when Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, is brought to the court of David). It has further been argued that the almost duplicate lists of conquest territories for Saul in I Sam. 14:47-48 and for David in II Sam. 8:1-14 suggest an idealized Josianic/Dtr 1 empire, rather than an actualized listing of conquest territories.¹⁴ Similarly, it has been argued that the David-Bathsheba marriage is out of

chronological sequence for the reign of David, but is placed in its current location for the purpose of the prophecy-fulfillment schema the Nathan oracles create.¹⁵ Thus, the question remains, since so many units are seen to be out of chronological order, why do scholars argue for the historicity of the Samuel corpus?

Finally, the extensive use of parallel or duplicate narratives within I and II Samuel raises questions of historical intention. We have three accounts of Saul becoming king (I Samuel 9-11), two stories of the rejection of Saul by Yahweh (I Samuel 13 and 15), two accounts of how David comes to the court of Saul, as a musician (in I Samuel 16) and as a military hero (in I Samuel 17), two accounts of David and Jonathan talking about Saul's plot to kill David (I Samuel 19 and 20), two accounts of how David spared Saul's life (I Samuel 24 and 26), two accounts of Saul's death (I Samuel 31 and II Samuel 1), and two accounts of the Ammonite Wars (II Samuel 10 and 11:1 and 12:26-31).¹⁶ In most of these instances of duplicates the problem is compounded by the fact that, while the same characters appear in both narratives, the characters in the second story are unaware of the events in the first story, thus making the disjunction more glaring. Interestingly, the debate within historical critical circles usually had to do with which story was the more historically reliable.

Thus, given these types of dynamics in the text, unity based upon secondary materials, stories out of chronological sequence, and a high number of duplicate narratives, it is surprising that this book is looked to for such a high degree of reliability for the historical reconstructions of ancient Israel and Judah. It appears that two factors have reinforced each other in this regard. On the one hand, the standard line, promoted by none other than Noth, himself, that the Dtr had very little to do with Samuel, coupled with Rost's and von Rad's arguments that some of the material was written by eyewitnesses to the

events, gave the material the appearance of being more historically reliable than theologically conditioned. On the other hand, there is a predisposition within the guild of biblical studies that whenever we come upon a war narrative there is an historical occurrence lying behind the narrative. Thus, the high number of war narratives found in I and II Samuel have added to this sense of hitting pay dirt historically.

II. New Views on Dtr and Samuel

Within the past two years, two works have been published which take issue with the above consensus. The first was Robert Polzin's, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*¹⁷ and my own work, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*. Both of these works have argued (1) that the Deuteronomist had much to do with the production of the book of Samuel; (2) that the Deuteronomist was not just a compiler of materials, as Noth and others have argued, but rather was a creative writer; and (3) that the book has as its intention critiquing pre-exilic Israel for the purpose of enlightening the exiles in Babylon. It should be noted that there is not agreement between Polzin and myself on the questions of method, nor on the degree of Deuteronomic involvement, but the similarities of our conclusions remain high.¹⁸

On the whole Polzin makes many fresh, valuable, and insightful observations on the nuancing of the text and depiction of characters within the book. He also raises throughout the work the question of what this telling of the story of kingship has to say to the exiles.

While Polzin appears to be correct in his arguing for an interpretation of the book as a message to the exiles, he leaves the reader flat concerning the nature of the message. He continuously points to the narrative and ideological voices within

the text, indicating a critique of kingship or repentance for the exiles, but he never examines what that message might be. On the other hand, his limiting the scope of Deuteronomistic critique to the institution of the monarchy, appears to be incorrect. Eli is not a representative of the monarchy. Eli and his sons are representatives of a corrupt cult. Similarly, Samuel is a representative of a corrupt and self-serving prophetic institution.

A major difference between Polzin's reading and mine is that in *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*, I follow Cross in his argument for two redactions of the Deuteronomistic history. I further argue that the first Deuteronomist was Josianic and wrote the material as a justification and polemic for the imperialist desires of Josiah, as exemplified in II Kings 22 and 23. It is the view of Dtr 1 that liberation in the name of Yahweh at all costs is sanctioned by the deity and is to be supported by the people. I further argued that the second Deuteronomist was exilic and was asking the question, how did we who understood ourselves to be formerly an oppressed people, liberated from slavery by Yahweh, end up being the oppressor.¹⁹ This writer, or school of thought, whatever the case may be, used the technique of writing parody on the excessive traditions of the first Deuteronomist.

A second major literary difference between Polzin and myself is in the area of the attention paid to women in the narrative. As will be argued below, the Deuteronomistic school utilized women literarily to achieve specific purposes within the narrative. Polzin, on the other hand, generally ignores the gender of the characters in his analysis.

Thus, like Polzin, I see the Deuteronomist heavily engaged in the Book of Samuel as a creative writer. Unlike Polzin, however, I see differing levels of involvement, with a dialogue going on between the first and second Deuteronomists. Like Polzin, I see this work directed in its final form to the exiles in

Babylon, though I take it that the message is broader than just the subject of kingship at stake. Finally, like Polzin, I am wary of attempts to over historicize these narratives without paying attention to the theological debate underway in the text, though I would also wish to pay attention to the dynamics of interplay between the layering of traditions within the text.

Now the question before us is how these hermeneutical insights lead to differing interpretations for the book. It is to this task we now turn. Since space is limited, I would like to investigate two units with these hermeneutical lenses to see how they offer us different readings. The first is the Hannah-Eli complex in I Sam. 1. The second is the beginning of the Ark Narrative in I Sam. 4, and its interplay with I Sam. 7.²⁰

III. The Hannah-Eli Complex: A Case of Status Reversal

I Samuel 1:1-18 contains the story of the birth of Samuel. We are told that a certain man, named Elkanah goes up to Shiloh annually with his family for sacrifices to Yahweh. We are also told that Elkanah has two wives, Hannah and Penninah, the latter having children and the former being barren. The family dynamics are not good, in that there is conflict between the two women that is fed by the behavior of the husband, who shows favoritism to Hannah over Penninah.

On one of these visits of the family to Shiloh, Hannah, after refusing to eat, drink, or be comforted by Elkanah, goes into the place of worship at Shiloh and bargains with Yahweh, that if Yahweh will give her a son, she will dedicate him back to Yahweh, to serve Yahweh all his life. Eli, the priest, sees her speaking without sound coming from her mouth and scolds her for being drunk. She defends herself by stating that she was praying to Yahweh. Without seeking any more information from her, Eli blesses her and she goes back to the family happy.

Upon the return home to Ramathaim, Elkanah and Hannah have sex. Yahweh remembers her, she gets pregnant, gives birth to a son, whom she names Samuel, *semu'el*, because he was asked, *sa'al*. After weening the child, the mother returns to Shiloh, fulfills her vows by depositing her son with Eli the priest. Yahweh accepts the gift of Samuel and gives her many more children.

Let us begin by looking at the Deuteronomic influence within this unit. In the first instance, the unit begins by talking about the whole family—parents and children—going to the shrine for an annual festive celebration. This is close to the Deuteronomic instructions in the opening verses of the Deuteronomic Code in Dt 12:11-12, which reads:

...then you shall bring everything that I command you to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for [God's] name: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you together with *your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves*, and the Levites who reside in your towns...[emphasis mine]²¹

It must be noted that this expansion of the listing of people to be at the shrine for the festival, and especially the inclusion of the women of the family and their children, is unique to the Deuteronomic Law Code.²² Thus, it is in this framework that we are to understand why not only Elkanah, but also Hannah and Penninah, as well as Penninah's children, are at Shiloh for the sacrifice.²³ This same language of going to the shrine for the purpose of bringing one's sacrifice and vows is picked up again in I Sam. 1:21. By the same token, the laws of

Dt 12 speak to eating and drinking at the shrine, which are activities in which Hannah refuses to engage until after the confrontation with Eli. Thus, it appears that there is a basis for judging this unit as one grounded in the work and theology of the Deuteronomist.

Literarily, there are several interesting dynamics at work in this unit. The first is found at the very beginning with the extensive genealogy of Elkanah. He is introduced to the reader as Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. This is an unusual introduction of a character, since usually one is introduced by giving the name of the character and the character's father.²⁴ Here, however, Elkanah's pedigree is given for the four preceding generations, totaling five in all. This suggests to the reader that, with such a distinguished pedigree, this is truly an important figure.²⁵ This might even give the impression that we have struck pay dirt with history, until we check out the genealogy. When we do so, we note that with the exception of the Chronicler copying these names in I Chron 6:35 none of the people in this family tree are mentioned again in the canon.²⁶ In other words, Elkanah comes from a long list of nobodies. What was thought to be a link to historical reconstruction is a dead end.

Could this be the Deuteronomist saying, "Don't bother chasing down other historical leads, for they also can lead you into dead ends? Instead, look at the theology which is to follow!" Similarly, could this be the Deuteronomist saying to the exiles, "It is not your pedigree which will be salvific for you. You in Babylon may be of the intelligensia, but this story begins with a nobody, who comes from a long line of nobodies." By the same token, the message is given that the people in Babylon do come from a line which can be traced, and the promise of a future may be grounded in the reality of their past.

The use of the barren woman motif is noted from

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patriarchal narratives, as well as from the Deuteronomic introduction of Samson in Judges 13. In using this motif the writer gives us the clue that this one to be born is to be special.²⁷ The question is, however, is this to be a bumbling incompetent like Isaac, or a charismatic leader like Samson? With the introduction of the lateral violence and rivalry between Peninnah and Hannah, similar to that of Leah and Rachel, one wonders whether the child to be born will become a high government official like Joseph, who becomes an architect of oppression on behalf of the colonial power, leading to the eventual enslavement of his own people.

Within this narrative there is a reversal of roles between Hannah and Eli, which is most striking. At the beginning of the narrative we are told that Hannah was barren, which meant in the eyes of the ancient reader that she was not able to fulfill her responsibility to the family. Thus, she was one of low status. This understanding is reinforced both by the taunts of Peninnah, in v. 7, and by the actions and speech of Elkanah in v. 8, "Aren't I worth more to you than ten sons?"²⁸

On the other hand, Eli is introduced mechanically as the priest of Shiloh who had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These names reverberate with the Aaronite line, as well as with Egyptian names, thus suggesting high status in Israel.²⁹ By the end of the narrative, however, these positions will be reversed.

The first indication of the reversal is that Hannah enters the shrine, the *hykl yhw*. The narrator tells us that Eli is sitting at the entrance, at the *mezuzah*, which reminds the reader of Samson grabbing the *mezuzah* in Jud. 16:3 and tearing down the walls at Gaza. One wonders why this priest allows a woman to approach the altar, for such had not been legislated in Dt.

We finally hear the voice of this woman, who has been talked about and talked to in the preceding ten and a half verses, but who has not been allowed to speak.³⁰ She prays a

prayer in which she bargains with Yahweh that if Yahweh will give her what she is lacking, she will give it back to Yahweh. She wishes to be rid of the taunts of Peninnah, as shown in her speaking of her '*ani*,' her affliction. She beseeches; the deity to remember and not forget her. We only hear part of her prayer. As the narrator tells us, she continued to pray.

The narrator next tells us that the priest, seeing her at the altar speaking without sound coming from her mouth, thinks she is drunk. This is troubling, for as we shall find out, when we are told by the narrator that Nabal (I Sam. 25:36-38) and Uriah (II Sam. 11:13) get drunk, this is a prelude to their deaths. But then one wonders, how would one see a person in a shrine moving their mouth but not being audible, and think they were drunk? Why didn't he think that she was praying? How is it that this woman knows how to pray, which is told to us by the narrator in vv. 11 and 12, and then carried forward with the statements that she was speaking her heart, but this priest does not recognize the signs of praying? In fact he confuses them with drunkenness.³¹

In the next exchange the situation gets worse, for this woman defends herself by saying that she has been "pouring her soul out to Yahweh." Instead of asking her what the problem is, Eli blesses her saying, "May the God of Israel grant what you ask." On what basis does he do this? Why should we put any trust in one who lets a woman approach the altar, mistakes her prayer for drunkenness, and pronounces blessing without knowing the request? Clearly there is a question of competency at issue here.³²

Thus, our story ends up with the one of low status, the barren Hannah, having high status, and the one with high status, Eli, the priest, being discredited. We see in this interchange a technique which will be employed in other places within the book in a similar manner, namely, the presentation of a man and

a woman in a situation in which she does his job better than he. Such happens in I Sam. 19:11-17, when Saul sets up a plan to kill David by posting guards outside David and Michal's apartment. She outplans Saul and administers her plan better than he, since she is able to help David escape and then defends herself with her father, so that she goes free. Similarly, the technique is seen in the interchange between Abigail and David in I Samuel 25, when she out-maneuvers her husband, Nabal, by bringing the requisite supplies to David.³³

Also, the use of the wise woman of Tekoa to trick David into letting Absalom return after the murder of Amnon is another such example. Thus, it appears it is a literary technique of Dtr to use women to be foils of men, by virtue of their ability to do the man's job better than he.³⁴

Finally we look at this narrative in terms of its message to the exiles. As noted earlier, I disagree with Polzin in reading this narrative as if it relates to kingship. Rather the book begins with a critique of the priesthood. As the narratives in ch. 2 show us, Eli's sons are corrupt and he has lost control over them, such that the Man of God will confront Eli and prophesy the end of his house as a priestly house. So also will Yahweh reveal this to Samuel in ch. 3. What we have here in ch. 1 is the whole picture summed up in one set of confrontations between Eli and Hannah. Those who have been excluded from the cult, women, as the laws in Dtr suggest, are more in tuned with Yahweh than the priests. One reason Judah is in exile is because of her priests, who failed to do their jobs in line with Yahweh's will. It is not just her kings, as Polzin would have us believe, it is also her priests. The prophets have proclaimed such, as seen in Hosea 4 and Jeremiah 7. Now the Deuteronomist makes the same proclamation.

Thus, it is not by happenstance that we start out with a barren woman motif leading to the birth of a key figure. Added

to this motif is the element of a woman who is competent within the cult, even more competent than the priests.

Moreover, there is another message to the exiles in this narrative interchange. Hannah goes away assured. The good news is that even in the face of incompetent priests, the laity can receive God's assurance. They too, just like Hannah, can barter with God to remove their affliction and pain, and Yahweh will answer them. There is hope, even when the clergy are incompetent, and to exiles, that can be seen as Good News.

IV. The Philistine War: A Case of Empty Religion

The second story to be examined in this way is the beginning of the Ark Narrative, the war with the Philistines in I Sam. 4:1b- 11. As the story goes, the Philistines gathered for war against Israel. In the first battle the Philistines defeated Israel. After the battle the elders of Israel decided they had lost the battle because they did not bring the ark with them, so they sent back to Shiloh for it, and Hophni and Phinehas brought it to them.

When the ark came into the Israelite camp the army shouted, which caused the earth to tremble. Upon hearing the noise the Philistines realized that the Israelite gods had entered the camp. They summoned up their courage, lest they fall prey to the same fate as the Egyptians at the Exodus.

The two armies once again engaged in battle. Once again the Philistines soundly defeated the Israelites and captured the ark of the covenant. In so doing the two sons of Eli died, in fulfillment of the prophecies in I Samuel 2 and 3.

Our claim that this narrative is from the hands of the Deuteronomist is based on the similarities between it and the Ammonite War Narrative in II Samuel 10, which we have previously argued to be from the same source.³⁵ On the one hand,

we have here a parody of the holy war motif. There is mention of the ark, the shout of the people, the trembling of the ground, three of the five elements of holy war as presented by von Rad.³⁶ In a like manner, the call to the Philistines, *hthzqw whyw l'nsym*, "Take courage and be men," (v. 9), is very close to the call of Joab in II Sam. 10:12, "Be strong, and let us be courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God. . ." Finally, there is a version of the *Heilsgeschichte*, salvation history, in vv. 8-9.

As we look more closely at this narrative, however, there are a number of elements missing from the holy war motif which are key in their omission. On the one hand, in the muster of the armies there is no notation as to the size of either, which is significant, for in the holy war motif, Israel is usually far outnumbered as a means of showing the power and might of Yahweh in battle. Rather, both armies muster on different mountain ranges, the Philistines at Aphek, and Israel at Ebenezer (v. 1), suggesting that they are of equal size.

More importantly, Yahweh has not called for this war, nor does Israel consult with Yahweh as to whether to go to war.³⁷ Rather Israel has gone out on its own to battle without a divine assurance. At the same time, once Israel is initially defeated, they send for the ark, but even then, there is no consultation, no request for guidance from Yahweh. Instead, there is a blind following of the elders. As they say, "Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, so that [Yahweh] may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies (v. 3b)." This appears to be more human manipulation than divine unction.

Polzin correctly argues that the portrayal of the Philistines in ch. 4 is one of a bumbling army. Such is definitely the case in the speech attributed to them in vv. 6-9. As he correctly

points out, the facts are wrong. Let us listen to them:

When the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" When they learned that the ark of the Philistines LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid; for they said, "Gods have come into the camp." They also said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight."

This is not the first time the Deuteronomist has placed the recitation of the *Heilsgeschichte* into the mouth of a non-Israelite, for in Jos. 2:9-11 Rahab recites it to the spies hiding on her roof in Jericho. The irony of that passage is that in Jos. 1, Joshua was told to go take the land. Instead of doing this, he sends out spies, similar to Moses, who was foiled by this strategy in Num. 13-14. At the same time, while these men/spies are hiding in fear of the Jericho army, Rahab is telling them of the mighty acts of Yahweh, which convince her that they are to be victorious and it would be worth her while to become a traitor to her own people.³⁸ As in our previous study of Hannah, we see once again the Deuteronomist presenting a woman who does the man's job better than he.

There is, however, a curious twist to this recitation of the salvation history, for the Philistines get the story wrong. First, it is not "gods" who have come into the camp, it is Yahweh, one God. Secondly, their speculation that such has never happened

before is incorrect, inasmuch as it happened throughout the book of Joshua. Thirdly, the striking of the Egyptians with plagues did not happen in the wilderness, rather it occurred in Egypt. They have "miscited" the story.

Now Polzin suggests that such a recitation must have been comical to the Israelite hearers.³⁹ My contention is that the exact opposite is the case, for these Philistines who cannot even get the history correct are able to defeat Israel, even when the ark of the covenant is present. This must have been a chilling reality.

The question still remains why the Deuteronomist would place such a mistaken recitation of the salvation history into the mouths of the victorious Philistines. It would appear that the Deuteronomist is trying to critique a corrupt worship and misuse and abuse of religious symbolism on the part of Israel. In other words, it appears the Deuteronomist is saying, we cannot just trot Yahweh out whenever we desire to accomplish our own ends. Rather, we must be in line with Yahweh's ends. For if we do so, if we cheapen our religion by pulling out the ark whenever we decide to do so, Yahweh will not bless us. In fact Yahweh will give victory to the enemy, as happened with the Babylonians sacking Jerusalem. Isaiah had told them that Yahweh could use idol worshipers as Yahweh's tool to chasten Yahweh's people, (Isaiah 7:20). Jeremiah tried to warn the people that the claim of the priesthood that the existence of the temple in Jerusalem would save them was erroneous (Jer. 7:4). Yahweh does not sanction such perversion of religion. So now the Deuteronomist makes the same claim. Even those who mix up the history can be Yahweh's agents to carry out Yahweh's plan to punish a corrupt people and a corrupt priesthood. This must have been part of the message to the exiles.

At the same time, the Deuteronomist's answer to the defeat of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity is given in the

speech of the Philistines with the words: "in order not to become slaves to the Hebrews." The writer is saying that the problem with Israel was that they themselves had become oppressors. The prophets kept crying that Israel had perverted the Exodus by becoming exploiters themselves. Thus, the Deuteronomist argues that the defeat of Israel by the Philistines and the resultant loss of the ark, the symbol of Yahweh's presence with the people, in I Sam. 4, like the defeat of Israel by the Babylonians and the destruction of the temple, the place where Yahweh caused Yahweh's name to dwell, in II Kings 25, is a result of the misuse of Yahwism and its sacred pledges.

Our suspicions about this misuse of religion is further substantiated by the narrative in I Sam. 7:2ff. In that narrative it is Israel's repentance, and their request of Samuel to seek Yahweh's guidance that leads to their defeat of the Philistines. Such is the message of the Deuteronomist to the exiles: seek Yahweh and Yahweh's guidance, and even Israel/Judah's defeat by the Philistines/Babylonians can be reversed.

Thus, Polzin's argument that the return of the ark is followed by an Israelite victory over the Philistines because of their repentance is correct. On the other hand, his argument that the theme of kingship is carried into the Ark Narrative is not.⁴⁰ In the Deuteronomists' splitting the Ark Narrative in the way that it is currently split, with the Philistine war, contest between Yahweh and Dogon, plague and return of the ark by the Philistines in I Samuel 4-7, followed by the victory of Israel over the Philistines under Samuel's leadership as judge, the message of the Ark Narrative is not one of kingship. Rather it is a caution against a corrupt cult and a call to return in repentance to Yahwism. In a foreign land, Yahweh can take care of Yahweh's self (I Sam. 5). Yahweh is still Lord. The ark will make it home (I Sam. 6), and so can Israel, if they return and repent.

By the same token, there is a dialogue between the exilic and monarchic Deuteronomists in this arrangement. The war narrative in I Sam. 7 is one of unbridled sanctioning of war under the aegis of Yahweh. The caution of the war narrative in I Sam. 4 is that such has to be tempered with a faithfulness to Yahweh and not an attempt to use Yahweh as a puppet.⁴¹

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the argument has been made that Polzin is correct. On the one hand, the Deuteronomist was very active in the writing of the Book of Samuel. In fact, not only as a compiler of traditions, but more importantly as a creative writer.

Secondly, Polzin was correct in arguing that we should read Samuel as a message to the exiles. In so doing we hear an explanation of how Israel, in Babylon, got there and how she can get back. On the other hand, Polzin's limiting the critique of Israelite institutions to that of the monarchy, has not held up under our analysis. Rather it is the whole range of Israelite and Judean institutions, the priesthood and its practices, the prophetic institution and its own desires, which come under scrutiny in this book.

Future analyses will then have to look at what the Deuteronomists have to say about the institutions of prophecy and monarchy. Polzin is correct. There is a negative critique of the monarchy. Our argument has only been that there is more there, and were we, in 1992 to listen, there might even be a message for us.

NOTES

¹As Noth states in his Introduction, "...the tribes which formed the larger entity 'Israel' were only fully united at the occupation of the agricultural land of Palestine, and it is only from that point that the real 'History of Israel' can take its departure." [emphasis mine] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, rev. ed., (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 5.

²Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David, Historical Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship*, 1 (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1982). For a critical assessment of Rost's theory and the research since its publication cf. chs 1-2 of my *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12*, JSOTSS 75, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

³Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, translated by M. D. Rutter (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1981), 55-56.

⁴Gerhard von Rad, "The Beginnings of Historical Writings in Ancient Israel," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, 166-205, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

⁵Frank Moore Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,' in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*," 274-289, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973).

⁶For a more detailed discussion of this see my *David in Love*, pp 135-6, n. 75.

⁷J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1, *King David* (II Sam. 9-20 and II Kings 1-2) (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1981) and *idem*, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 2, *The Crossing Fates* (I Sam. 13-31 and II Sam. 1) (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1986).

⁸David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, JSOTS 14, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980); *idem*, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, JSOTS 6, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982).

⁹Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, (Indiana University, 1985).

¹⁰A. Weiser, *The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development*(New York: Association, 1961). In this he has also been followed by G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Initiated by Ernst Sellin (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), and O. Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

¹¹P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel*, Anchor Bible no. 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); idem. *II Samuel*, Anchor Bible no. 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984).

¹² Cf. Patrick D. Miller and James J. M. Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the 'Ark Narrative' of I Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977) for a more extensive bibliography on this matter.

¹³See my discussion on the history of debate on the Nathan oracle in 2 Sam. 12:7b-13 in *David in Love*, pp. 20, 45-46.

¹⁴Cf., *David in Love*, p. 65.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 58-61.

¹⁶Cf. my discussion of there being duplicate narratives, as opposed to one continuous Ammonite War Narrative in *David in Love*, pp. 75-78.

¹⁷Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

¹⁸For a detailed review of this work see my "Review of Robert Polzin's *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*," in *The Virginia Seminary Journal* (1991:19). ¹⁹The importance and implications of such a hermeneutic for cautioning liberation theologies need to be further explored.

²⁰These passages were chosen because they speak directly to concerns of liberation issues and to the differences in Polzin's and my readings of the text.

²¹Interestingly, one sees the dominant male view and lack of recognition of the significance of the inclusion of women in this legislation in the works of G. von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, OTL, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 92-93 and A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, NCB, (Greenwood: Attic, 1979), pp. 226-227.

²²Weinfeldt argues that the Deuteronomic Law Code was an attempt to humanize the older codes. He cites as an example the inclusion of women within the sphere of the law. Cf. M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

²³It should be noted that the Covenant Code does not mention coming to the shrine for sacrifices, and the one law in the Holiness Code which mentions sacrificing and fulfilling vows states, *we'is ky yaqrib*, "and when a man sacrifices," Lev 22:21.

²⁴R. Wilson states, "The biblical genealogies may be used as sources for historical research, but they cannot be used uncritically. Each individual genealogy must be examined, as an attempt made to assess the reliability of each of the components. As a part of this process, the peculiar nature of genealogy must be taken into account, and in particular the function of any genealogy must be determined." *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University, 1977), p. 246.

²⁵H. W. Hertzberg interprets the long genealogy as "a sign of a noble and well-known family." *I & II Samuel*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 22.

²⁶Cf., R. W. Klein, *I Samuel*, WBC, (Waco: Word Books, 1983), pp. 5-6, and McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 58, for discussion on the differences in the genealogies in this unit and I Chronicles.

²⁷J. G. Williams refers to this as a "type scene," and notes this unit as an example of the "contest of the barren wife" along with Gen. 16:1-16 and 21:1-7; 29:31-30:24, in his book, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Sheffield:

Almond, 1982), pp. 48-49.

²⁸Polzin argues that this statement bespeaks Elkanah's sense of dejection in that Hannah is not satisfied with his love, which Elkanah assesses as worth more than ten sons. He further likens this to the sense of dejection voiced by Yahweh (I Sam. 8:8) in Israel not being satisfied with Yahweh and wanting a king. Thus, he argues this is the beginning of the polemic of Dtr against the kingship. Cf., *Samuel*, pp. 22 and 26.

²⁹On the connection of the Aaronite line to its Egyptian background see C. B. Copher, "Blacks and Jews in Historical Interaction" *JITC*, 3(1975), p.13; "The Bible and the African Experience," *JITC* 16(1988), p. 39; and *idem* "The Black Presence in the Old Testament," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by C. H. Felder, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), p. 155. and R. B. Coote and D. R. Ord, *In the Beginning: Creation and the Priestly History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 32-33.

³⁰Cf. Walter Brueggemann, "I Samuel 1: A Sense of a Beginning," *ZAW*, 102(1990):33-48 for further discussion on Hannah's voice.

³¹It is most interesting to note how many commentators portray the actions and words of Eli with sympathy. They read the text with the eye that, if he thinks she is drunk, we must vindicate this assessment (cf. Hertzberg, p. 24, who speculates that Hannah was praying ecstatically, and Klein, p. 8, and Polzin, p. 27, who refer to the notices of strong drink in vv. 11 and 22.) As will be noted below, it appears that the narrator is not as sympathetic to this character and is poking fun at him.

³²As Esther Fuchs argues, "It is not clear whether Eli is promising YHWH's help, or merely expressing his wishful blessings. Either way, Eli remains unaware of Hannah's specific request, which does not add much to his already suspect stature as divine oracle and representative of YHWH." Esther Fuchs, "The Literary

Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia*, 46(1989), 157.

³³Polzin seems to miss the significance of women to the Deuteronomist's schema. He correctly points to Hannah and Abigail as key characters. He does not, however, ask why the Dtr places them in such pivotal roles, nor does he examine why they are given such speeches to deliver. He seems to miss Michal, the daughter of Saul, concentrating almost solely on Jonathan to her exclusion. In other words, he glosses over the unusualness of women occupying these positions of prominence in the society of their day as a clue to a narrative technique. Similarly, Polzin ignores completely the body of feminist and womanist (literature).

³⁴Fuchs argues that, "As feminist studies of androcentric fiction demonstrate, male-authored female characters reveal more about the wishful thinking, fears, aspirations, and prejudices of their male creators than about women's lives/experiences/ perceptions." "Literary Characterization," p. 152.

³⁵I have argued that II Sam. 10 is a parallel or duplicate tradition on the Ammonite War Narratives of 11:1+12:26-31, in which the Deuteronomist pokes fun at the holy war traditions and at the veneration of David. My method was the examination of phraseology, which had previously gone unrecognized as characteristic of the Deuteronomist, such as in 10:1-2 and 19, and at the use of the literary technique of reversals on motifs. Cf. *David in Love*, pp. 78-81.

³⁶Cf. G. von Rad, "Deuteronomy and the Holy War," in *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM, 1953), pp. 45-59.

³⁷Jos. 6:1-5 and II Sam. 5:19 are examples of seeking or receiving Yahweh's guidance prior to battle.

³⁸See the discussion of this unit in *David in Love*, pp. 157-8, n. 55.

³⁹Polzin states, "The Israelite, knowing well such traditional

depictions of the mighty acts of God, would have taken special pleasure in recognizing how the Philistines had misheard or misread their opponent's sacred traditions." *Samuel*, p. 58.

⁴⁰Since Polzin is intent on reading all references in this book to the establishment and downfall of kingship in Israel, he places the narrative on the loss of the ark into the same motif (pp. 62-64). Given the shrine nature of the ark, however, it appears more likely that the suggested parallel between the loss and the ark and the destruction of the temple is apt in the Deuteronomic message to the exiles.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 73-75. Polzin does not deal with the irony that it is the respect of the Philistines and their cultic leadership that enables the ark to be returned, which is rewarded by a defeat of them under the direction of Yahweh.